

# The Last of the Patriarchs

## Genesis Chapters 49 & 50

### October 13, 2019

Here now in Genesis chapter 49, we are blessed with the details of a beautiful and powerful event. The moment where Jacob gathers his household around him to share a prophetic vision that can be compared in scope and detail only with the prophetic vision found in Daniel chapter 11.

## Jacob Blesses His Sons

**Genesis 49: 1-2 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> Then Jacob called his sons and said, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come. <sup>2</sup> “Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob, listen to Israel your father.

**Question for Discussion:** Place yourself in the moment here. Jacob, father and grand patriarch of the entire household, summons his sons for what is portrayed as arguably the most important meeting in their family history. His sons are aware that he is near death and hear clearly the urgency in the tone of their father’s voice as he calls all to his presence, What would you suspect the mood of the sons to be as they answer the call of their father and gather around his bed? What things might you suspect would be going through each son’s mind as they gather together?

**Disposition** - a person's inherent qualities of mind and character.

The prophecies that flow from the mouth of Jacob here as we continue in chapter 49, are exceptional in their remarkable detail, almost poetic in structure as they flow steadily from Jacob’s lips as his eyes move from son to son.

## Looking into the Future

“You can't always get what you want... You can't always get what you want... You can't always get what you want... But if you try sometimes, you just might find... You get what you need!” From “**You Can’t Always Get What You Want**” by **The Rolling Stones**

## RUEBEN

Reuben, Jacob's firstborn son, would normally be recognized as one who deserved to receive a special blessing and prophecy because of his position. This blessing normally included roles of leadership and priesthood as well as a double portion of the birthright.

**Genesis 49: 3-4 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch!

Jacob’s prophecy for Reuben focuses on Reuben’s favored position as the firstborn. A son fathered by Jacob in the prime of his physical life. A time when he was at his most vigorous and his procreative powers at their greatest.

Rueben lost his position of dignity because he defamed and defiled his father's honor by having sexual relations with Jacob's concubine wife in chapter 35. Here, Jacob describes the spirit and character of one who would carry out such a deed as similar to unstable or turbulent waters. Essentially, reckless behavior has cost him his stature as the responsible eldest son and all of the typically associated blessing that go along with such a position.

**Question for Discussion:** What range of emotions do you imagine Rueben must have felt as his father prophesied of his and his lineage's future? What do you think the effect was on the remaining brothers as they listened to Jacob address Rueben?

Rueben's tribe never rose to prominence in Israel. No one in the tribe of Rueben ever ruled, ever rose to prominence except in a negative sense. Not one of the judges was a Reubenite. The tribe of Reuben was the first tribe to demand its inheritance and, careless of consequences, would rashly choose the wrong side of Jordan.

And Reuben was the first tribe to be carried into captivity by Tiglath-pileser the Assyrian

**I Chronicles 5:26 (ESV)** <sup>26</sup> *So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, the spirit of Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and he took them into exile, namely, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river Gozan, to this day.*

## **SIMEONE AND LEVI**

Both Simeone and Levi were sons of Leah. They were Jacob's second and third born sons and were inexorably linked by their actions in life and their personalities.

**Genesis 49: 5-7 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *"Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. <sup>6</sup> Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness, they hamstrung oxen. <sup>7</sup> Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.*

**Genesis 34: 25 (ESV)** <sup>25</sup> *On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males.*

**Question for Discussion:** Why was it that Simeon and Levi attacked the city of Shechem and killed all of the male inhabitants?

**Question for Discussion?** Why weren't Simeone and Levi justified in their actions? What do you think it was that Jacob felt they did wrong?

Both Simeone and Levi were blood brothers of Dinah (by Leah). In describing their anger he chooses powerfully descriptive adjectives. Calling their anger *fierce* and their wrath *cruel*.

Jacob found the personal character of each of the two sons so deeply twisted that in dramatic terms he pleads that his own soul in no way resemble theirs.

As a result of the cruelty exhibited by the two brothers, Jacob prophesies that their descendants will be scattered. Lacking no personal land or inheritance of land. Many years later, we find that this is exactly what happened.

Of all the tribes, Simeon alone had no inheritance in the promised land. The only portion of land the tribe of Simeon would receive in the future, was a small share of the land given first to the tribe of Judah.

**Joshua 19:9 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> *The inheritance of the people of Simeon formed part of the territory of the people of Judah. Because the portion of the people of Judah was too large for them, the people of Simeon obtained an inheritance in the midst of their inheritance.*

The scattering and dividing of Levi was the same, but with a very important difference. Levi took a stand for God at Baal-peor when Israel sinned with the daughters of Moab (Exodus 32). When Moses raised his standard and cried: "Who is on the Lord's side?" it was the tribe of Levi that responded.

The Levites received no actual territorial grant in Canaan; instead they received forty-eight cities scattered up and down the kingdom among the tribes.

## **JUDAH**

Next, Jacob turns his attention to Judah. Judah had some shady things in his background. Anybody remember Tamar? So, you couldn't really blame him if he had some apprehension as his father's eyes turned to him. What would Jacob say now, at the judgment seat, about that pagan woman he had married? Would he say anything about his parental slackness that had resulted in the vileness of Onan and Er? What would he say about the wretched business with Tamar?

**Genesis 49: 8-12 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *"Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. <sup>9</sup> Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? <sup>10</sup> The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. <sup>11</sup> Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.*

**Question for Discussion:** Judah has a sordid past. There were plenty of instances of bad behavior scattered throughout his history. Why do you think Jacob completely overlooks Judah's past mistakes and speaks only glowingly of his fourth oldest son?

Now, looking at Judah, Jacob saw a leader... *"Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you..."*. Judah had prevailed over the mistakes of his past and had become a godly man. Lordship was bestowed upon him over his brothers and his enemies.

Jacob's prophecy for Judah points far into the future to the Prince of Peace who would hold the sceptre of absolute and universal dominion. He would come from Judah's line. What more could Judah have than that, for by giving Him the Messianic line, Jacob is essentially giving him everything.

## **ZEBULUN**

Zebulun was the youngest of Leah's sons. Genesis tells us nothing about him beyond the fact he was one of those who sold Joseph—but that was the common guilt of all his brothers besides Benjamin. He had

never been a very bold man like Judah nor yet a very bad man like Reuben. What would Jacob say to him?

**Genesis 49:13 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> *“Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon.*

Jacob does not describe Zebulun here by his character. Rather, he immediately states that his future territory would denoted by the fact that he would live by the seashore and become a haven for ships.

Zebulun never obtained "seaside property." The tribe of Zebulun would be landlocked, since the tribe of Asher would be between them and the Mediterranean coast. But this tribe was within ten miles of the Mediterranean Sea and was able to "feast on the abundance of the seas" (Deut. 33:19) and so Jacob's prophecy here would ultimately be fulfilled.

## **ISSACHAR**

Issachar was Jacob's sixth son. He was also one of Leah's sons, the son born when Leah hired away Jacob from Rachel. The circumstances of his birth may have colored Issachar's character, for he does not seem to have been an active and aggressive person but one quite content to take a humble place.

**Genesis 49:14-15 (ESV)** <sup>14</sup> *Issachar is a strong donkey, crouching between the sheepfolds. He saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant, so he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant at forced labor.*

The tribe of Issachar would obtain land in lower Galilee, including the eastern portion of the Valley of Jezreel. This valley was located between the low hills of Galilee (including Mt. Tabor) and the hills where Manasseh would live (including Mt. Gilboa). Jacob recognized how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor.

Again, this probably does not refer to any situation that would cause Issachar or his descendants to become a slave to one of his brothers or even to a foreign invader.

Instead, the expression seems to depict how Issachar would embrace a strenuous and difficult agricultural way of life. Choosing not to seek political dominance.

## **DAN**

Dan was the first son to be born by proxy to Rachel. He was a son of Bilhah the maid. Nothing is said about Dan in Genesis beyond the fact that Joseph gave Jacob an evil report about the boy and his three closest brothers. But that was years ago. Would Jacob bring that up now? What would he say to Dan, a man who felt keenly his inferiority as a son of a bondwoman? What would Jacob say to him?

**Genesis 49:16-18 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *“Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. <sup>17</sup> Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that his rider falls backward. <sup>18</sup> I wait for your salvation, O Lord.*

The name Dan was connected originally with vindication (Gen. 30:6). Here however, the name is connected with justice.

Although the biblical record only records Samson as a judge from this tribe, it must have exercised this role in other ways. But the tribe of Dan is also said to be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that

bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward. This tribe would be treacherous and would end up leading Israel into idolatry in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of Judges.

## **GAD**

Gad was the first son born to Leah's maid, and we know no more about him than we know about Dan. He, too, was included in Joseph's ill report to the father along with Asher and Naphtali.

**Genesis 49:19 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> *"Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels.*

Gad would choose his inheritance on the far side of the Jordan. His territory was under constant attack from warlike, nomadic tribes, which swooped down upon his fields from the deserts. All the tribes that settled east of Jordan were vulnerable and, indeed, were the first to be carried away when Assyrian hordes came down on the fold.

The tribe of Gad was not without its notables. Jephthah, Barzillai, and Elijah (prince among the prophets), were all from the tribe of Gad.

## **ASHER**

Asher was another of the bondwomen's sons, like the others, a seeming nonentity. The undistinguished sons of Jacob represent the crowd, the rank and file of the faith, the great mass who fill out the ranks of the redeemed. At the judgment seat of Jacob all were to be present; all had to appear. Even if the life lived was somewhat obscure, there was no difference.

**Genesis 49:20 (ESV)** <sup>20</sup> *"Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal delicacies.*

Asher, would live along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This tribe's food would be rich; he would provide delicacies fit for a king. Not only would Asher live in an area with fertile farmland (the lowlands of the Carmel range north along the coast) and abundant rain, but he would have the opportunity to trade for goods from other sections of the Mediterranean world. The character of Asher is not mentioned—only his future prosperity.

## **NAPHTALI**

The remaining bondwoman's son was Naphtali. Jacob, knowing his son's nature, points first to his natural wildness.

**Genesis 49:21 (ESV)** <sup>21</sup> *Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns.*

The tribe of Naphtali would live north and west of the Sea of Galilee in a rugged, isolated, but fertile area. Apparently, this tribe would exhibit a freedom and beauty that would be different from the other tribes.

## **JOSEPH**

Now, Jacob's eye falls on Joseph, and his own eloquence takes wings. He had much to say about this eminently godly man. For that is what is going to count most when facing the judgment seat. Joseph had always been Jacob's favorite. There was an attraction from birth that drew Jacob's heart inseparably to the eldest son of his beloved wife Rachel.

**Genesis 49:22-26 (ESV)** <sup>22</sup> *“Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. <sup>23</sup> The archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him severely, <sup>24</sup> yet his bow remained unmoved; his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), <sup>25</sup> by the God of your father who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that crouches beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. <sup>26</sup> The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of my parents, up to the bounties of the everlasting hills. May they be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers.*

Jacob had just given Joseph a double portion in Israel by adding Ephraim and Manasseh to the tribes. He now foresaw how fruitful that addition would be. After the second census in the wilderness those two tribes, taken together, were by far the most populous in Israel. Joseph was a fruitful bough.

The tribe of Joseph known as Ephraim, would become prosperous and fruitful as they dealt with invaders from their central hill-country position in the middle of what would become known as Samaria. The land of Ephraim had good rainfall and abundant harvests. Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim. In later years this tribe would contend with Judah for the leadership role. When the nation divided into north and south, Ephraim gave its name to the northern territory.

The second tribe of Joseph known as Manasseh, was subdivided into two half tribes. They were located on each side of the northern portion of the Jordan River. This area also experienced good rainfall and abundant crops.

Jacob states that he had been blessed above his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. But, now proclaims that Joseph will be blessed beyond even himself.

## **BENJAMIN**

Benjamin was the son of Jacob's old age, born in the same hour that Rachel died, and the son of his right hand. As he looked at Benjamin he underlined his character.

**Genesis 49:27 (ESV)** <sup>27</sup> *“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey and at evening dividing the spoil.”*

The territory allotted to Benjamin would be small (only about four hundred square miles) but rugged and placed in a most strategic position for the defense of the whole land.

As Jacob continued to look at Benjamin he was seeing his future conquests. *"In the morning devouring the prey, and at evening dividing the spoil."* Two illustrious Benjamites would be found in Scripture. Both named Saul, one in the Old Testament, the other in the New Testament.

The judgment-seat experience had been painful for some, pleasant for others, but the verdict had been perfect in each case. Not a voice was raised in protest, each individual knew he had been fairly dealt with, and that the judge had been without bias.

## **Jacob's Death and Burial**

**Genesis 49:28-33 (ESV)** <sup>28</sup> All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him. <sup>29</sup> Then he commanded them and said to them, “I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, <sup>30</sup> in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. <sup>31</sup> There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah— <sup>32</sup> the field and the cave that is in it were bought from the Hittites.” <sup>33</sup> When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

**Genesis 50:1-15 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> Then Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. <sup>2</sup> And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. <sup>3</sup> Forty days were required for it, for that is how many are required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days. <sup>4</sup> And when the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, <sup>5</sup> ‘My father made me swear, saying, “I am about to die: in my tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me.” Now therefore, let me please go up and bury my father. Then I will return.’” <sup>6</sup> And Pharaoh answered, “Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear.” <sup>7</sup> So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, <sup>8</sup> as well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household. Only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen. <sup>9</sup> And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen. It was a very great company. <sup>10</sup> When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and grievous lamentation, and he made a mourning for his father seven days. <sup>11</sup> When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “This is a grievous mourning by the Egyptians.” Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim; it is beyond the Jordan. <sup>12</sup> Thus his sons did for him as he had commanded them, <sup>13</sup> for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. <sup>14</sup> After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

**Question for Discussion:** It is interesting to see that Joseph chooses to petition Pharaoh for permission to leave to bury his father Jacob in the land of Canaan through the household of Pharaoh himself instead of directly. Why do you think he chose to ask in this way? Wouldn't he have been sufficiently powerful and respected to have asked him directly? What do you believe it shows with respect to the position of his future offspring within the kingdom of Egypt?

# THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL

Around 1200-1050 B.C.  
(according to the Book of Joshua)

